

23.v.1953; 10 miles S. Northampton, 19.vii.1953; 2 miles W. Northampton, 18.iii.1953; 7 miles W. Northampton, 28.x.1952; 8 miles W. Northampton, 25.x.1953; 43 miles SSE. Roy Hill Hstd., 25.v.1953; 3 miles W. Sherlock Hstd., 3.vi.1953.

Biology: Eighteen series of this termite have been collected in Western Australia of which 6 were found in galleries under old or embedded logs or other pieces of wood and 3 were collected under stones. Four series were found occupying parts of deserted mounds of *Tumulitermes tumuli* and 2 were taken from galleries at ground level in the hard clay walls of occupied mounds of *Coptotermes brunneus* Gay. Of the remaining 3 series, one was collected in soil galleries, another under a pad of dry cow dung and the final one from fragile earth covered runways built over eucalypt twigs and leaves lying on the ground. One of the Mt. Magnet series included nymphs. The alate caste is unknown.

In common with all species of *Tumulitermes* which have been adequately studied, *T. reealvus* conserves food in stores. In this species these take the form of enlarged sections of the subterranean galleries loosely packed with small pieces of chaffed dried leaves, bark and other litter.

OCCASITERMES OCCASUS (Silvestri)

Distribution: Formerly believed to be restricted to south-western Australia, this species is here recorded for the first time from South Australia. South Australian records are as follows:— 3 miles NW. Poochera, 31.vii.1952; 11 miles WNW. Waddikee, 31.vii.1952.

Biology: Both South Australian series which included all castes, were found under partly embedded old eucalypt logs, a situation in which the species is most commonly found in Western Australia.

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AUTOTOMY OF THE TAIL IN MAMMALS

by VINCENT SERVENTY

Many animals have the ability to break off parts of the body under certain types of physical or mental stress. This is often recorded in lizards, particularly in geckoes, snake-lizards and certain skinks. The usual explanation is that the behaviour has a protective function, enabling the animal to sacrifice the tail to an enemy and escape. Later the lost part may be regrown.

Surprising though it may seem this behaviour has also been recorded with mammals. The effect is discussed at some length by F. Bourliere (*Natural History of Mammals*, 1955, p. 120).

Although I have not met this behaviour in the case of our native mammals I came across the following reference by J. F. Haddleton (*Katanning Pioneer*, 1952, p. 100):

"The marl or native pig resembled the bandicoot in his mode of living as regards food, but was much smaller than the bandicoot being very light in colour, long thin snout, small thin ears and a very thin tail and very tender. If you caught them by the tail the skin would just peel off and they would go off with a skinless tail leaving you with the bit of skin in your hand."

Ellis Troughton (*Furred Animals of Australia*, 1941, p. 67) says of the Marl (*Perameles myosura*):

"No specimens have reached the Perth Museum since 1900 and it is now assumed that it is extinct." He makes no mention of this habit.

Tail loss is interesting historically in regard to the Pig-footed Bandicoot (*Chaeropus caudatus*). Major T. L. Mitchell (*Three Expeditions into the interior of Eastern Australia*, 1839, p. 131) says:

"The most remarkable incident of this day's journey was the discovery of an animal, of which I have seen only the head among the remains found in the caves at Wellington Valley. This animal was of the size of a young, wild rabbit, and of nearly the same colour, but had a broad head, terminating in a long very slender snout, like the narrow neck of a wide bottle; and it had no tail."

As a result it was given the name *caudatus*.

Commenting on this Troughton (*Ibid.* p. 76) says:

"It was not then realised that bandicoots were prone to such an undignified casualty."

Gerrard Krefft (*Transactions of the Philosophical Society of New South Wales*, 1862-1865) in a paper "On the vertebrated animals of the Lower Murray and Darling" says:

"I was in the habit of showing a copy of Sir Thomas Mitchell's tail-less specimen to the natives, urging them to procure animals of that description; of course, they did not recognise it as a 'landwang', and I was furnished in consequence with a large number of the common bandicoot (*Perameles obesulus*) minus the tail, which, to please me, had been screwed clean out."

It would be interesting if members could keep a lookout for tail loss in mammals, especially under circumstances where such loss may have been of value to the individual in question.

THE FOOD HABITS OF THE FROG, *Myobatrachus gouldii* (GRAY)

by J. H. CALABY, Wildlife Survey Section, C.S.I.R.O.

Myobatrachus gouldii (Gray) is the most specialised of the Australian frog fauna. Its very small head and extremely short